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WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

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26.0° C -5.0° C
Janakpur Jumla



Janakpur Bolts celebrate after defeating Sudurpaschim Royals in the final of the Nepal Premier League T20 cricket tournament at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday. (Report on Pg 7)

Milantha's bolts help Janakpur clinch inaugural NPL title

The opener's 87 off 49 propels the Bolts to a successful pursuit of a daunting 185 target, securing thrilling victory.

SPORTS BUREAU
KATHMANDU, DEC 21

Janakpur Bolts clinched the title of the inaugural edition of the Nepal Premier League T20 cricket tournament after they defeated Sudurpaschim Royals by five wickets in a high-octane final at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday.

United States wicketkeeper-batter Lahiru Milantha scored a scintillating 87 runs off 49 balls, helping Janakpur successfully chase down a challenging target of 185 runs with four balls to spare. Milantha's explosive innings featured nine boundaries and four sixes.

Milantha gave Janakpur a solid start with a 73-run opening stand with Aasif Sheikh.

Aasif made a brisk 33 runs off 19 balls before falling to Saif Zaib in the 6.6 overs.

Mohammad Mohsin followed soon after, bowled by Ishan Pandey in the 9.6 overs.

Milantha was dropped in the first ball of the 12th over by Dipendra Singh Airee and it proved costly as the American capitalised by stitching together another vital 61-run partnership with Harsh Thaker.

Scott Kuggeleijn finally caught-and-bowled Milantha in the 15.1 overs but Thaker's unbeaten 30 off 24 ensured Janakpur crossed the finish line.

"Absolutely amazing," player of the match Milantha said after the match. "I am so happy... I cannot describe it. These guys are amazing. Credit goes to them. Both teams played very good cricket. But we came on top."

Earlier, Sudurpaschim opted to bat first and posted an imposing 184-9, thanks to a commanding 117-run partnership of openers Zaib and Binod Bhandari.

Sudurpaschim's Saif Zaib and Binod Bhandari partnered for 117 runs in a lost cause.

Zaib cracked 69 runs off 43 balls, laced with eight fours and two sixes, while Bhandari contributed a steady 41 runs off 31 balls.

However, the middle-order collapse stymied their momentum. Kishore Mahato (3-25) triggered the slump by dismissing Zaib in the 12th over, followed by Lalit Rajbanshi removing Bhandari. Mohsin then inflicted further damage with the key wickets of Harmeet Singh (14), Dipendra Singh Airee (9) and Aarif Sheikh (1).

Kuggeleijn added 13 off 10 before falling to Mahato, who then dismissed Naresh Budayair (8).

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TODAY

NATIONAL

Tribhuvan University's provision for teachers to study abroad is being misused. Any teacher who has taught for five years after permanent posting is eligible to get paid study leave for three to five years. **Pg 3**

OPINION

Abhi Subedi dwells on roles of three women—Mandakini, Balakrishna Sama's wife; Sushila Koirala, BP Koirala's wife; and Manu Kumari Thapa, Lain Singh Bangdel's wife—in their husband's success. **Pg 4**

MONEY

Small investments, easy work, and good benefits made beekeeping lucrative for many Palpa villagers. What threatens the occupation's sustainability though is that these beekeepers hardly receive any government help. **Pg 5**

WORLD

Kyiv staged a major drone attack on the Russian city of Kazan, 1,000 kilometres from the frontier, as Moscow's troops captured a new frontline village in eastern Ukraine nearly three years into the invasion. **Pg 6**

Shekhar Koirala puts down marker by launching bid for Congress presidency

General Secretary Thapa's intentions are not clear while there're also doubts if the convention will be held on time.

ANIL GIRI
KATHMANDU, DEC 21

With a year to go before its 15th general convention, the race for the prize of the Nepali Congress president is starting to heat up.

Senior party leader Shekhar Koirala has 'unofficially' kicked off his campaign to win the party's coveted post from Sudurpaschim Province, traditionally a stronghold of party president Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Starting the campaign in Deuba's heartland and getting strong support of party leaders and cadres in the region means he wants to win Deuba's support too, said a Congress leader of the Koirala camp.

Koirala, who lost the election to Deuba at the 14th general convention in December 2021, is contesting again. The two-term limit imposed by the party charter for the top post prevents Deuba from running again.

The incumbent president has so far not disclosed who he will support as his successor. Another potential candidate is General Secretary Gagan Kumar Thapa, who has not officially declared his candidacy but has already activated his network and mechanism to win the support of party workers across the country.

Koirala on Friday interacted with party leaders and cadres of nine districts in the Sudurpaschim Province and sought their support for his bid.

He and other central members interacted for six hours with local party leaders in Dhangadhi and solicited their views, Govind Raj Pokharel, who was with Koirala, told the Post. "We had excellent interactions, following rousing welcome from party leaders and cadres," Pokharel said.

"You can call it an 'unofficial' launch of the campaign but the focus is also on putting pressure on the party leadership to hold the 15th general convention on time," said Pokharel. "That is the central thrust of the meetings and interactions."

Given the list of pending tasks, prospect of timely general convention is slim, leaders say.

But the prospect of convening the 15th general convention in December 2025 is slim as the party encounters new complications in the distribution of active membership. Only active members can elect party leaders from the ward level. Those elected ward members later vote for the party's representatives from all 165 electoral constituencies, who in turn vote for the new party leadership.

>> Continued on page 2



सिपले सम्मान. सिपको सम्मान

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Syrian Kurdish groups on the back foot as power balance shifts

Turkey seems determined to exploit the changing equation in Syria to the fullest.



People carry freshly baked bread at a market in the Syrian capital Damascus on Saturday.

REUTERS
QAMISHLI, SYRIA/BEIRUT/ANKARA, DEC 21

With hostile Turkish-backed groups mobilising against them in Syria's north, and Damascus ruled by a group friendly to Ankara, Syria's main Kurdish factions are on the back foot as they seek to preserve political gains carved out during 13 years of war.

Part of a stateless ethnic group straddling Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Armenia and Syria, Kurds have so far been among the few winners of the Syrian

conflict, controlling nearly a quarter of the country and leading a powerful armed group that is a key US ally in countering Islamic State.

But the power balance has tilted against them since the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) swept into Damascus this month, toppling President Bashar al-Assad, two analysts and a senior Western diplomat told Reuters.

The seismic change in Syria is expected to yield deeper Turkish sway just as a change of US administration

is raising questions over how long Washington will keep backing the country's Kurdish-led forces.

For Turkey, the Kurdish factions represent a national security threat. Ankara views them as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 and is deemed a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and other powers.

The Syrian Kurdish groups "are in deep, deep trouble", said Aron Lund, a fellow at Century International, a US-based think tank.

"The balance has shifted fundamentally in Syria to the advantage of Turkey-backed or Turkey-aligned factions, and Turkey seems determined to exploit this to the fullest."

The shift has been reflected in renewed fighting for control of the north, where Turkey-backed armed groups known as the Syrian National Army (SNA) have made military advances against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Fanar al-Kait, a senior official in the Kurdish-led regional administration, told Reuters that the ouster of Assad, whose Arab nationalist Baath Party oppressed Kurds for decades, presented a chance to stitch the fragmented country back together.

>> Continued on page 2

Will Kolkata become the next New Delhi in the coming five years?

ROUSHAN CHATTERJEE
KOLKATA, DEC 21

Recently, Delhi's air pollution grabbed the attention of the country when its Air Quality Index (AQI) reached the mark of 700 in some parts of the region. Schools were shut down, masks—once worn during the COVID-19 pandemic, again became common, and air pollution became a heated topic of discussion across various platforms. However, now—when the AQI slightly dropped to below 250, which is still 'very unhealthy,' the urgency has disappeared, and people have resumed their daily lives.

This raises questions like- can this ignorance lead to a more vulnerable situation, and are other cities 'safe' from this advancing global concern?

The issue of air pollution is rising in Kolkata. While the city's air quality has not reached the extreme levels like Delhi, it's still on an alarming rise. Considering this situation, can a city like Kolkata (where the AQI is already between 150-200, 'very unhealthy') be safe, or may it face a similar fate to that of Delhi in the near future?

Factors contributing to air pollution

There are certain components that contribute to the rising air pollution during winter. "During the winter season, there's a change in the direction of wind speed. In summer or monsoon season, the wind direction in our country is from southeast to north-west, but in winter, it flows from northwest to southeast. In this way, wind flows from the upper Indo-Gangetic plain from Punjab, Haryana, followed by Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand to West Bengal. Also, the wind speed is faster in summer or monsoon compared to winter," an official of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board (WBPCB) shared with The Statesman. He claimed that West Bengal, being at the receiving end of the upper Indo-Gangetic plain, results in all the pollutants reaching West Bengal and accumulating there. "More than 40 percent of the pollutants in West Bengal are from other regions. This is the primary reason for worsening air quality in West Bengal."

Another natural factor is that during the winter, the winds are usually heavy. "In summers, when the temperature rises, heat radiates from the ground, causing the nearest air from the ground to become warmer. This warmer air is lighter and rises up in the atmosphere, and along with it, the dust and pollutants also rise up. Since the wind speed is higher in summer, it blows these pollutants away," he explained.

While in winter, due to the low temperatures, the wind is heavier and remains closer to the ground. The wind speed is also slow, so the dust generated by vehicular emission, burning of coal, and smoke released by the industries doesn't rise up in the atmosphere and remains at the ground level, where people breathe in it. As a result, people suffer from breathing problems, and those with chronic bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are impacted adversely.

Other than natural elements, anthropogenic activities add to this condition. "We know about the primary reasons like vehicular emission and the toxic gases released by the industries. However, there are some other factors that we don't consider. For instance, during November, dry leaves fall to the ground, and the local

sweeper collects and burns them. Many times, plastic waste thrown in the ground gets mixed with these leaves and burns as well. This is harmful as the gases released by burning dry leaves are dangerous, and when plastic is added to it, it releases dioxin gas, which is highly carcinogenic and a primary cause of cancer," he stated. He also highlighted factors like the burning of coal while cooking. Many slums and roadside eateries, like local food and tea stalls, don't have LPG and rather use coal for cooking.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

The National Clean Air Programme is a long-term initiative to improve the air quality in India. Launched in 2019 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), the initiative aims to achieve reductions up to 40 per cent or achievement of National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Particulate Matter₁₀ (PM₁₀) concentrations by 2025-26 (reduce PM₁₀ concentrations by 40 percent from the 2017-18 period by 2025-26). It includes 131 non-attainment cities, one of them being Kolkata, across 24 States and Union Territories of the nation.

Why is Kolkata not Delhi?

In terms of pollution, Kolkata's geographic location plays a crucial role when compared to Delhi. West Bengal is at the end of the upper Indo-Gangetic plain and beside the Bay of Bengal. Delhi is a landlocked city, and



its neighbouring regions experience stubble burning during winter. Stubble burning is the practice of intentionally burning stubble after the grains are harvested. It is illegal in India, but because of the weak enforcement, it is still practiced in parts of Punjab. Stubble burning is one of the key contributors to the rising air pollution.

The toxic gases released from the burning of stubble reach Delhi, and as Delhi's temperatures are lower compared to Kolkata, the wind there is heavier. The heavy winds accumulate the pollutants and contribute to the extreme level of air pollution observed in Delhi. However, Kolkata is far from states like Punjab, and being beside the Bay of Bengal, the temperature is milder than in Delhi. "Hence, Kolkata can never have an extreme level of air pollution like Delhi. Moreover, compared to 2019, the AQI of Kolkata has reduced with the implementation of work under NCAP. However, this is still not sufficient as we have the target of reducing 40 percent of PM₁₀ concentration of 2017-18 levels by 2025-26," claimed the official.

Steps taken by WBPCB

The WBPCB has undertaken several measures to curb pollution in West Bengal under NCAP. Some of the primary measures include providing smokeless chulha, where coals and woods can be burned for cooking. However, it will not release any gas. WBPCB has provided 10,000 smokeless chulha to people living in slums and to roadside stalls in Kolkata, Howrah,

and Barrackpore, reducing open biomass burning. "Through satellite monitoring, we identify areas where biomass burning occurs and inform the district administration or local police station to take immediate action," the official explained.

EV-integrated dust suppressant water sprinkling systems are another approach to combat dust pollution. Usually, when vehicles move on the road, they cause resuspension of dust-dust particles rise up, and when a car passes by, it again settles back down. For that reason, WBPCB is using water sprinklers combined with dust suppression agents on the road. This initiative is being carried out through e-vehicle because using diesel vehicles will only add to the pollution, defeating the purpose of the initiative.

An ambitious project adopted by WBPCB is the creation of a Green Bioshield. "More than 40 per cent of the pollutants in West Bengal are from other regions. Considering the factor, we have decided to build a natural green cover by growing trees along the 780km stretch bordering Bihar and Jharkhand."

This initiative is aimed at creating a natural barrier against the pollutants carried by the north-west winds. This cover is done in three layers. "So far, 30 km has been covered and will require 7-8 years for completion." Efforts are also being made to combat industrial pollution. "Air pollution control devices have been installed in industries like thermal stations, the cement industry, and the steel industry. We are also decarbonising government vehicles to reduce emissions and increase efficiency," the official affirmed.

Expert's view

Biswajit Roy Chowdhury, member of the State Wildlife Board and Secretary of the National Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS), said vehicular emission, particularly carbon monoxide is deadly for human lungs and a primary cause for the increased incidence of cancer and pulmonary diseases in Kolkata and West Bengal.

"States with industries should focus on green energy. Like in Sweden, a new factory is going to produce green steel."

Chowdhury also highlighted the challenges while transitioning, "We always emphasise the use of e-vehicles. However, due to its high cost, it is often inaccessible to the common man."

Role of the common man

While both the officials of WBPCB and the Secretary of NEWS have suggested measures that we, as common men, can undertake. First, we must reduce the usage of fossil fuels and adopt cleaner technologies. When we see dry leaves being burned, we should make people aware of the health hazards it can cause. Even during a morning walk, many of us stand beside roadside tea stalls to drink tea. As a result, we fail to get the benefit of a morning walk because we end up inhaling the toxic gases released from the burning of coal used in these stalls. So, we should be aware and make others aware as well to combat this heightened global issue.

While Kolkata is not likely to face a severe crisis like Delhi, the city's current air quality is still very unhealthy and a pressing concern. The air we breathe is a shared resource, and its protection is a shared responsibility. Kolkata may not become the next Delhi, but the time to act is now.

— The Statesman

Misuse of TU's 'study abroad' provision prompts concern

The country's oldest varsity doesn't have a proper record of its teachers who have gone abroad on paid study leaves. Officials say they are now collating data.

POST REPORT
KATHMANDU, DEC 21

Around four dozen Tribhuvan University teachers who went abroad on study leave have not returned, flouting the university law.

Following the publication of a media report that said the opportunity to study abroad was being misused, the TU had sought data from its different departments. The Centre for Investigative Journalism reported that the country's oldest varsity doesn't have a proper record of its teachers who have gone abroad on paid 'study leaves' and whether they have returned after completing their study abroad.

On December 8, the university's Coordination Division had directed all of its constituent colleges, institutes and agencies concerned to report about such teachers. "As of now, we have received the information that at least 42 teaching staff who have travelled abroad for study haven't returned, flouting existing laws," Deepak Tiwari, the Division's acting chief, told the Post. "It will take some days for us to prepare the detailed report."

The university allows its teachers—mainly the lecturers and assistant professors—to study abroad for their capability enhancement. Any teacher who has taught for five years after permanent posting is eligible to get paid study leave for three to five years.

While lecturers themselves find the universities of their choice for the study, there are also the opportunities allocated for the teachers from the TU.



POST FILE PHOTO

Most of such study abroad opportunities the Nepali teachers get are scholarships, mainly for the Mphil or PhD programme.

The university's 'Teacher Staff Service Rules-1994' has specific provisions about the eligibility for such opportunities. Its clause 30 states that teachers who have used their study leave for five years must return to service and serve for at least five years. One using three years of leave has to be in the classrooms for the same period after the completion of their study abroad.

The teachers wanting to get paid leave for study abroad must sign a bond with the coordination division in line with the TU staff rules. They also need to present a witness while signing the bond based on the service rules.

The rule's clause 84 states that if a teacher doesn't attend the office for 90

days, the university can sack them. However, there are minimal cases where such teachers have been sacked.

So much so that, in several cases, the teachers who have been staying abroad have been receiving the salary from the university. The university administration says they will fully implement the law once all the data of the defiant teachers is available.

The report of the University Grants Commission states that as many as 8,122 teachers are associated with the oldest university. Of them 689 are professors, 2,199 are associate professors, 4,124 lectures, 984 assistant lectures and 126 are instructors.

Among universities, the TU receives the highest budget from the government. Of the total Rs17.46 billion for the university education, the oldest and the largest university 's receives Rs12.26 billion.

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Request for Expression of Interest (EoI)

Date of Notice Publication: 22 December 2024
EoI Number : AEPC/BES/EoI/2081/82-01

- Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC) is implementing Renewable Energy Programmes and intends to apply a portion of these funds to eligible payments under the contract for which this Expression of Interest is invited for National Consulting Services.
- AEPC hereby invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from eligible consulting firms ("consultant") to provide the consulting service: **Monitoring and Assessment of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) registered Biogas Plants.**
- Interested eligible consulting firms may obtain further information and EOI documents free of cost at the office of AEPC as mentioned above address during office hours on or before **12:00 Noon on 6 January 2025** or may visit e-GP system of PPMO: **www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp** or may visit the client's website: **www.aepc.gov.np**.
- Separate Expressions of interest need to be submitted for each task.
- Consultants may associate with other consultants to enhance their qualifications.
- Expressions of interest shall be delivered online through e-GP system of PPMO: **www.bolpatra.gov.np/egp** on or before **12:00 Noon on 6 January 2025.**
- In case the last date of obtaining and submission of the EOI documents happens to be a holiday, the next working day will be deemed as the due date but the time will be the same as stipulated.
- EOI will be assessed based on **Qualification [40%], Experience [45%], and Capacity [15%]** of consulting firm and key personnel. Based on evaluation of EOI, only shortlisted firms will be invited to submit detailed Technical and Financial proposal through a Request for Proposal (RFP).
- Minimum score to pass the EOI is: **70 (Seventy).**
- Other details are provided in uploaded EoI document.

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OPINION

Guiding youth

They need special attention and constant encouragement to stay away from social ills.

AMIN VALLIANI



Pakistan is currently the world's fifth most populous country. The majority of the population consists of youth between the ages of 18 to 30. The youth are our future, our most valuable assets; in their hands will soon lie the reins of the nation. However, we see that they are facing tremendous problems in finding a direction in life. They need guidance, help, and role models.

It is the parents' prime responsibility to guide their children on the way to success. It is necessary for parents to inculcate sound ethics in the younger generation so that they refrain from waywardness.

Adolescence is a particularly important phase of life. It is a unique stage for laying the foundations for the future edifice of life.

stant encouragement to stay away from social evils.

Normally, youths seem to be ambitious. Therefore, they should be encouraged to explore new opportunities and keep pace with the changing world. Parents may try to convince them that they should not rely on shortcuts for fame and success but work hard and embrace challenges so they may achieve success through struggle. In any field they choose, they should not simply chase grades but acquire real knowledge. Here, parents should try to instill in them a strong sense of commitment.

Of late, the use of social media amongst the youth has increased manifold. Consequently, this has increased parents' responsibilities significantly. There is a lot of fake content on various social media platforms. It is, therefore, the parents' responsibility to protect the youth from the adverse effects of fake content. They have to balance screen time with physical activities to promote a healthy digital lifestyle. Monitoring should be coupled with open conversations and setting limits.

The youth are required to understand the nature of life. Life is tough and competitive; it is not a bed of roses, nor is it full of thorns. It is full of ups and downs. It's like an endless ocean. We are sailing in a boat and want to touch the shore.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Adolescents experience rapid physical and cognitive growth. This affects how they feel, think, share, make decisions, and interact with the world around them.

Though every young person is different from the other, and each builds his or her life according to their own individual experiences, they all share some basic traits. For example, they want to be attractive, energetic and passionate in their peer circle. They adopt new fashions and hairstyles, flaunt new clothes, and dream about achieving certain goals. With each passing day, they become more and more independent about the things they like, how to get around and where to go, how to spend time and how to spend money.

The youth are required to understand the nature of life.

As they become more independent, there come some changes in family routines and relationships, as well as their friendships. It is a period where they develop their own perceptions about the world. This creates a gap between parents' thinking and that of their offspring. Many youths resort to throwing tantrums over trivial matters. In many cases, parents lose their influence over youths, but it is necessary that they keep an eye on their behaviour and try to reduce the gap between them.

It is also a precarious stage where youths can be misled and adopt negative habits like smoking, or take to drug addiction. Therefore, they need special attention and con-

We must stay determined and try our best to reach our destination. If we quit making an effort, we will never get what we want and those who get what they want, will never stop trying for it.

Islam places great emphasis on the role of youth in shaping a prosperous future, recognising their potential for development and efficiency. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) in his wisdom, is said to have advised youngsters to make the most of their youth, health, wealth, free time, and life itself. According to a hadith, the Prophet said: "Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your riches before your poverty, your free time before your work, and your life before your death." This guidance aligns with modern scientific understanding, which acknowledges the vitality and innovation of young minds.

The Holy Quran mentions the story of the People of the Cave (Ashab-i-kahf)—a group of devout youth who sought Allah's help at the time of difficulties. They wanted to escape religious persecution; this is an example for all youths of how to surmount difficulties in life. The youth are facing major challenges today. They have to struggle and remain steadfast in their faith, for struggle itself is the meaning of life and there is no escape.

Valliani is an educationist with an interest in religion.

— Dawn (Pakistan)/ANN

Great writers, forgotten wives

WORDS & ECHOES

Women married to writers greatly influenced their lives, yet women's sacrifices were not acknowledged.

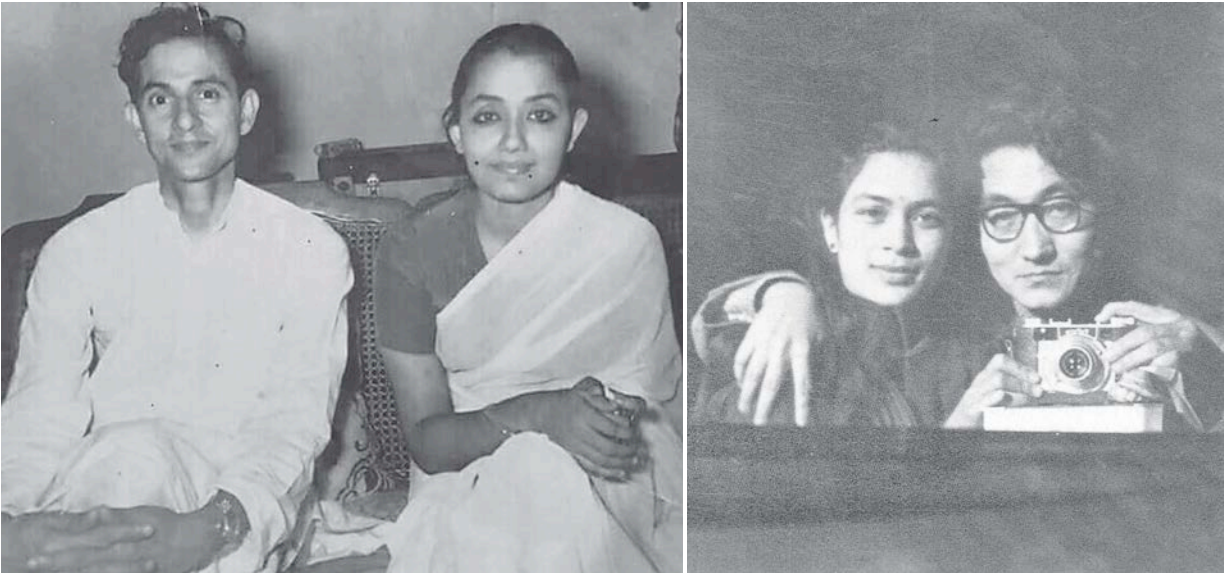
ABHI SUBEDI



Women play important roles in the lives of their husbands. In this column, I allude to the rare tales of remarkable women who reveal some unexplored aspects of literary writers and the influence these women had in their lives. This is evident from the stories of the wives of writers like Leo Tolstoy, PB Shelley, Laxmi Prasad Devkota and others mentioned in this article. Besides the women whose interviews are available, I would like to mention the roles of three notable women: Mandakini, Balakrishna Sama's wife; Sushila Koirala, BP Koirala's wife; and Manu Kumari Thapa, Lain Singh Bangdel's wife.

Creating Sushila Koirala's character in my play *Sandajuko Mahabharat* (2015) was challenging. BP extensively mentioned her in his autobiographical writings. I briefly spoke with Sushilaji about Sama's play, *Ma*, which she had directed and performed in Biratnagar in 1951, for which she is called the first Nepali woman director of a play. Sama clearly mentions Mandakini and her impact on his life. Her portraits, which he executed, can be seen in his house. Poet Kedar Man Vyathit once told me the Sama couple looked like a pair of doves. I know Manu *did*i's impact on Bangdelji very well and have also written about her.

This theme of women's contribution has struck me for a few reasons. First, I met these women through my relationship with the writers. Second, I met some of them while Bindu Subedi, the story writer and editor of the Nepali section of the English-Nepali quarterly magazine *Across*, conducted their recorded interviews. She published the interviews of the wives of eight writers and poets under a telling and critical title, "These forgotten wives—*birsieka shrimatiharu*—of the late literary writers", in two issues of the magazine. These



BP Koirala and Sushila Koirala

Manu Kumari Thapa and Lain Singh Bangdel

interviews unfold the tales of the women who played significant roles in the lives of their writer husbands.

It was a great privilege for me to attend some of these interviews. It gave me a chance to understand the power of these women and the ethics and challenges of the times they closely experienced. I was overwhelmed to hear how their influence on their husbands helped create the celebrated literary works. I especially recall meeting Mana Devi Devkota, wife of the eminent poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota, and Mishri Devi Shrestha, wife of poet Siddhicharan Shrestha. The other women interviewed in *Across* (February-April 1999) are Jyotsna Vyathit, poet Kedar Man Vyathit's wife, and the wife of writer Keshav Raj Pindali.

Ratna Lamichhane and Subarnaa Lamichhane, the wives of Shankar Lamichhane; Shova Aryal, wife of Bhairab Aryal; and Kanti Sherchan, wife of Bhupi Sherchan, are interviewed in another issue of the magazine (August-October 2001). Last year, I had the privilege of meeting Kantiji at the launch of the book *Bhupi: A Daughter's Memoir* by Kavita Sherchan, Bhupi's daughter. Only two remarkable women, Subarnaa Lamichhane and Kanti Sherchan, are alive today.

Ratna and Subarnaa fondly speak about Lamichhane from individual perspectives, and their interviews show compassion. Ratna was deeply familiar with Shankar's writings and his problems. Shova Aryal makes an interesting observation about her husband, Bhairav Aryal, who was famous

for satire and humour in his writings. She says, "Gautama Buddha had left home leaving his wife Yashodhara and son Rahul behind, but our humour writer chose to die by leaving six children from the age of thirteen to two and a half, and a wife in the lurch." In her interview, Kanti Sherchan praised Bhupi's humanism, his sense of freedom and dedication to his work. These women's stories about the condition of the writers' angst, their inspirations and the times they fought with are rare studies for critics and researchers.

The interviewer, Bindu Subedi, has written the following about the qualities and the enduring passion and compassion of the wives of the writers. These women, who bore the children and brought them up, fought minuscule battles in each case, sometimes too hard. They dealt with their husbands' moods, hid their pain behind smiles, supported them through their most difficult phases of life and preserved their writings. Some of them even established awards in their husbands' names, stayed beside them when they were ill and served and helped them. However, the writers have not written much in acknowledgement of the sacrifice of their wives.

There are some exceptions, though. Siddhicharan Shrestha has written a poem about Mishridevi, and Vyathit often mentions Jyotsna's name in his poems. Lain Singh Bangdel's gratitude towards Manu is seen throughout his works. But literary critics do not mention these women's contributions in their critical writings. When they

do, they distort. The interviewer claims that this becomes clear after listening to these women.

Mana Devi Devkota, who was 87 at the time of the interview in 2001, looked bright, confident and ready to share how she had been a good companion to her husband, Laxmi Prasad Devkota. I also went to see her then; I did not talk much with her except to express my pleasure to have met her. Devkota's life was full of events and stories about writing. His lifestyle and writing habits are also interesting. Devkota, the editor of *Yugvani*, which was supposed to be an anti-Rana publication, went to Banaras with the anti-Rana rebels, whom Mana Devi Devkota referred to as 'congress'. Mana Devi recounts a rare story to Bindu Subedi about how she went to Banaras to rescue the poet and safely brought him home. She faced several difficulties, and the 'congress party' people didn't cooperate, as they were unhappy with her for taking Devkota back home. In addition to experiencing financial challenges in bringing him back and continuing their life, she also had to face the wrath of the Rana regime.

These women have inspired their husbands at all the important moments. The structuralism of these women's help is based on the male-centric praxis. The commonality between all these women is that they helped their husbands by being with them during their difficult and happy moments. Being physically present by listening to their writings and perennially inspiring them during hard times is obviously a daunting task.

Nepal's yoga and meditation potential

The country can position itself as a global advocate for wellness through the two practices.

RAJ KUMAR BARAL



In today's world, physical and mental health have emerged as major issues. Stress, anxiety and depression have become all too common. Similarly, physical ailments such as cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure and weakened immune systems are on the rise.

Scientific research shows that stress negatively impacts the immune system. It makes individuals more

estimated 5 percent of adults worldwide suffer from depression and mental health issues, which are the primary reasons behind the global suicide rate of over 700,000 deaths each year.

In the wake of this situation, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution recognising December 21 as World Meditation Day. The day marks the importance of meditation, which has proven effective in reducing stress, promoting healing, increasing energy and thereby promoting peace and well-being in the world. This milestone was achieved through the strong advocacy of countries like Nepal, India, Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka and Mexico.

This initiative has historical significance for Nepal. Meditation dates back to the Vedic civilisation, when *rishis* (sages) practised it in the Himalayas to attain spiritual wisdom and enlightenment. Lord Shiva, often revered as the first meditator, is connected to Nepal through sacred sites like Pashupatinath Temple. Gautam

nised the significance of yoga, meditation and *swajagaran* (self-alerted awakening). It has incorporated meditation (along with yoga) into its policies and programmes for the fiscal year 2080-81, emphasising its role in key areas such as public administration, education, health, tourism and social development. The goal of this inclusion, as stated in the document, is to develop a healthy and ethical society across all three tiers of government—federal, provincial and local.

Some local governments are now implementing this vision at the grassroots by developing localised school curricula that include yoga and meditation. This initiative is promising because research conducted among the younger generation and school-goers worldwide has shown that meditation and yoga help improve their attention span and are instrumental in managing stress and emotional control. Additionally, these practices increase optimism and improve creativity and

spiritual heritage attract tourists who want to do yoga and meditation and experience Ayurveda and spa treatments in tranquil settings. Though few, there are hotels and resorts, Ayurveda hospitals, yoga trekking opportunities and specified places for yoga and meditation, such as yoga homes, ashrams and academies in and around Kathmandu. This trend establishes Nepal as a global hub for wellness tourism.

Nepal can unlock greater promises in the future by integrating meditation, yoga and *swajagaran* campaigns in various areas of society. Notably, these efforts also align with Sustainable Development Goal 3, which aims to ensure "good health and well-being."

Similarly, incorporating these practices into an ethical society can bring long-term benefits. Extending these practices into politics, administration and the private sector will also promote a mindful and ethically responsible society.

Finally, integrating these practices can preserve Nepal's cultural heritage and address modern-day challenges. Nepal can strengthen international relations, improve public health, address sustainability efforts, promote tourism and help achieve global peace by positioning itself as a global advocate for wellness through yoga and meditation,

Way forward

Strong coordination between the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, media and Non-Resident Nepalis is very important to strengthen Nepal's position as a global destination for wellness tourism. Nepal can attract more tourists seeking spiritual growth and wellness by spreading messages internationally.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, in consultation with its stakeholders, can be central in integrating yoga, meditation and *sua-jagaran* into school and university programmes. Academic institutions should now take the lead in teaching the art of staying alert by equipping learners with the skills to reflect inward and turn to themselves for clarity and balance. Such integration develops self-awareness and emotional resilience among learners and prepares them for personal and societal challenges.

Baral is pursuing PhD in Rhetoric and Writing Studies from the University of Texas at El Paso, the US.



SHUTTERSTOCK

vulnerable to diseases and contributes to other mental health problems like anxiety, depression and insomnia. Research reports also reveal that anxiety and depression significantly impair mental health by causing difficulties in work performance, affecting relationships and leading to social isolation, hopelessness and suicidal impulses. A recent World Health Organization report reveals that an

Buddha, who achieved enlightenment through deep meditation, further reinforced this connection to meditation. Moreover, meditation has remained central to the spiritual practices of Hinduism and Buddhism over the centuries, continuously shaping the country's spiritual landscape.

Current initiatives and prospects

The Government of Nepal has recog-

intelligence. Further, yoga supports physical health by improving blood flow and detoxification, while meditation helps manage pain and become mindful. These practices work together to support the mental and physical health of the younger generation.

This momentum is also reflected in Nepal's growing interest in wellness tourism. Nepal's landscapes and

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— Editors

FOREX	
US Dollar	136.33
Euro	141.62
Pound Sterling	170.47
Swiss Franc	152.37
Australian Dollar	84.87
Canadian Dollar	94.74
Singapore Dollar	100.34
Japanese Yen (10)	8.69
Chinese Yuan	18.68
Saudi Arab Riyal	36.28
Qatari Riyal	37.40
Thai Bhat	3.96
UAE Dhiram	37.12
Malaysian Ringgit	30.24
Korean Won (100)	9.41
Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank	
BULLION	
	PRICE PER TOLA
 Fine Gold	Rs 148,500
 Silver	Rs 1,760
SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA	

Sri Lanka president to visit key lender China

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO, DEC 21

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will travel to the island's largest bilateral lender China for talks in January, he said on Saturday, days after completing a long-delayed foreign debt restructuring.

China accounted for more than half of Sri Lanka's bilateral debt at the time of the 2022 economic crash, when Colombo ran out of foreign exchange to pay for essential imports such as food, fuel and medicines.

Its economy is recovering after receiving an International Monetary Fund rescue package and imposing austerity reforms aimed at repairing the government's ruined finances.

Leftist Dissanayake came to power in September on a pledge to fight corruption and tightened his grip after his party won a landslide in snap parliamentary polls.

"I will be going to China mid next month", he told reporters, without setting an exact date.

Dissanayake's first overseas visit as head of state was to neighbouring India, where he was given a red-carpet welcome by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 16.

Regional powerhouse India is competing fiercely with China for influence in the Indian Ocean region.

Sri Lanka sits astride the world's busiest shipping route, which links the Middle East and East Asia, giving its maritime assets strategic importance.

New Delhi has been concerned about Beijing's growing toehold in Sri Lanka, which it sees as being within its sphere of geopolitical influence.

Fitch Ratings upgraded Sri Lanka's long-term foreign currency issuer default rating to CCC+ on Friday.

Fitch said that while debt restructuring had "reduced the government's debt service burden and liquidity risks", it noted that the "general government debt/GDP and the interest/revenue ratio are likely to stay high in the medium term".

Poisoning from farm pesticides stuns beekeepers

Bees not only produce honey; they are also crucial to the food supply, pollinating hundreds of crops.



Long dry spells, dearth of flowering fields and excessive rainfall are among the reasons behind the declining bee populations, farmers say.

MADHAV ARYAL
PALPA, DEC 21

Mina Karki from Dekuldanda in Ribdikot rural municipality, Palpa, has been engaged in beekeeping for 30 years. But recently, with the rising use of pesticides in commercial farming, she has been facing the problem. Bees are dying or fleeing.

Most farmers are worried because honeybees are crucial to the food supply, pollinating over 100 crops. Reports say that three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world's food crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce.

Karki, who has been doing beekeeping with the support of her husband, has more than 25 hives.

She earns Rs60,000 annually and is motivated to earn while staying at home.

"But dying bees have troubled many people like me," said Karki. "I've been in the beekeeping business for three decades. This problem was rare."

Hom Bahadur Bhattarai of Bhairavsthan of Ribdikot has at least 35 hives. He has seen bees flying away. The hives have shrunk due to deaths as well.

The Bhattarai couple said the problem became severe in the past couple of years.

After generating a good income, Bhattarai added hives. He extracts honey three times a year. He assumed that the haphazard use of pesticides in vegetable and chilli farming has started impacting beekeeping.

Nara Bahadur Palli of Jhadewa in Mathagadhi rural municipality has bee hives, around 90, on his terrace.

He has been keeping traditional wooden hives for seven decades. Palli's source of income is honey produced in the hives. But he is facing the same problems as Karki and Bhattarai.

"Nobody has taken an initiative to solve the problem," said Palli.

Small investments, less hard work, and good benefits made beekeeping lucrative for many villagers. What threatens the occupation's sustainability is that beekeepers do not receive technical and promotional support from the government.

"Who will help us?" questions Palli. "I have been doing it on my own. I go to the Tarai to sell the honey, and I am fine with that."

Government data shows there are more than 20,000 bee hives in Palpa district alone.

The subsidies provided by the government are gobbled up by those who are clever and have direct access to it, said Palli.

Customers now reach farmers' homes to buy honey, so there is no problem with sales.

However, problems with beekeeping have only compounded.

"I used to make at least Rs150,000 from honey a year. But, recently, there are no bees in half the hives," said Palli. "Bees are disappearing. Most hives are empty. Even others have fewer bees."

Farmers are unable to stop bees from dying or fleeing. Though they have tried to retain the bees, nothing seems to be working.

Farmers say long dry spells of winter, lack of bee pasture and excessive rainfall were also the reasons behind the declining bee populations.

Marmara in Palpa is a good bee pasture area. Agriculture technicians

said honey can be extracted three to five times in this area.

Palli said that though he could save bees from other wild insects and pests, he failed to save them from dying due to the excessive use of harmful chemicals.

Santosh Kumar Chaudhary, an agri expert and acting chief of the Agriculture Knowledge Centre, said that due to the impact of climate change, pests have been increasing, and farmers are applying more pesticides.

"Recently, village farmers have started using pesticides on vegetables, fruits, and round chillis. But no one is aware of its direct and indirect impact."

Haphazard use of pesticides has not only made people suffer from diseases but also hugely impacted bees, Chaudhary said.

The Agriculture Knowledge Center has removed subsidies for beekeepers.

With the failure of the Smart Krishi Programme operated in Marmara of Jhadewa, Mathagadhi rural municipality by the Lumbini province, the government has allocated funds only for general training.

Chaudhary said beekeepers had not been informed about the problem.

However, according to the Agriculture Knowledge Centre, farmers' use of pesticides for commercial farming might have impacted bees.

With or without government support, farmers are earning well from beekeeping and are commercialising beekeeping at low costs.

The government data shows there are more than 20,000 beehives in Palpa.

If the processing, packaging, and market management can be done with less pesticide use, farmers can be more commercial and earn more, said an agri expert.

Albania shuts down TikTok at least for a year: PM Edi Rama

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TIRANA, DEC 21

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama announced on Saturday that the government will shut down social network TikTok for at least a year starting at the beginning of 2025.

During a meeting in Tirana with Albanian teachers, parents and psychologists Rama said that "TikTok is the thug of the neighbourhood". "We are going to chase this thug out of our neighborhood for one year", Rama said.

He added that the government will start programs that will "serve the education of students and help parents follow their children's journey".

The blocking of the controversial social network comes less than a month after a 14-year-old student was killed and another injured in a fight

near a school in Tirana that had begun with a confrontation on social media.

The killing sparked a debate in the country among parents, psychologists and educational institutions about the impact of social networks on young people. "In China, TikTok promotes how students can take courses, how to protect nature, how to keep traditions, but on the TikTok outside China we see only scum and mud. Why do we need this?", Rama asked.

The platform attracts young people with its never-ending scroll of ultra-brief videos, and has more than one billion active users worldwide.

TikTok has also faced accusations of espionage in the United States, and is under investigation by the European Union over claims it was used to sway Romania's presidential election in favour of a far-right candidate.

France's most powerful nuclear reactor finally comes on stream

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS, DEC 21

France on Saturday connected its most powerful nuclear power reactor to the national electricity grid in what leaders hailed as a landmark moment despite years of delays and technical setbacks.

The Flamanville 3 European Pressurised Reactor in Normandy started providing electricity to French homes at 11.48 am (1048 GMT) Saturday, the EDF power company's CEO Luc Remont said in a statement.

"Great moment for the country," President Emmanuel Macron said in a statement on X, calling it "one of the world's most powerful nuclear reactors."

"Re-industrialising to produce low-carbon energy is ecology French style," he added.

The EPR, a new generation pressurised water reactor, is the fourth to be finished anywhere in the world.

Remont of EDF called the event "historic."

"The last time a reactor started up in France was 25 years ago at Civaux 2," he said, referring to the Civaux power plant in southwestern France.

The connection was initially sched-

uled to take place on Friday.

It is the most powerful reactor in the country at 1,600 MW. Ultimately, it should supply electricity to upwards of two million homes.

The start-up comes 12 years behind schedule after a plethora of technical setbacks which saw the cost of the project soar to an estimated 13.2 billion euros (\$13.76 billion), four times the initial 3.3 billion euro estimate.

The start-up began on September 3, but had to be interrupted the following day due to an "automatic shutdown". It resumed a few days later.

Generation has been gradually increased to allow the reactor to be connected to the electricity network.

Nuclear power accounts for around three fifths of French energy output and the country boasts one of the globe's largest nuclear power programmes.

That is in stark contrast to neighbouring Germany, which exited nuclear power last year by shutting down the last three of its reactors.

Macron has decided to ramp up nuclear power to bolster French energy sustainability by ordering six EPR2 reactors and laying options for eight more, that could cost tens of billions of euros.



Operators work in the steam circuit sector at the third-generation European Pressurised Reactor project nuclear reactor of Flamanville, Normandy on June 14, 2022.

US funding bill clears Congress and heads to Biden, averting a shutdown

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, DEC 21

Facing a government shutdown deadline, the Senate rushed through final passage early Saturday of a bipartisan plan that would temporarily fund federal operations and disaster aid, dropping President-elect Donald Trump's demands for a debt limit increase into the new year.

House Speaker Mike Johnson had insisted Congress would "meet our obligations" and not allow federal operations to shutter ahead of the Christmas holiday season. But the day's outcome was uncertain after Trump doubled down on his insistence that a debt ceiling increase be included in any deal—if not, he said in an early morning post, let the closures "start now."

The House approved Johnson's new bill overwhelmingly, 366-34. The Senate worked into the night to pass it, 85-11, just after the deadline. At midnight, the White House said it had ceased shutdown preparations.

"This is a good outcome for the country," Johnson said after the House vote, adding he had spoken with Trump and the president-elect "was certainly happy about this outcome, as well."

President Joe Biden, who has played a less public role in the process throughout a turbulent week, was expected to sign the measure into law Saturday. "There will be no government shutdown," Senate Majority

Leader Chuck Schumer said.

The final product was the third attempt from Johnson, the beleaguered House speaker, to achieve one of the basic requirements of the federal government—keeping it open. And it raised stark questions about whether Johnson will be able to keep his job, in the face of angry GOP colleagues, and work alongside Trump and billionaire ally Elon Musk, who called the legislative plays from afar.

Trump's last-minute demand was almost an impossible ask, and Johnson had almost no choice but to work around his pressure for a debt ceiling increase. The speaker knew there wouldn't be enough support within the GOP majority to pass any funding package, since many Republican deficit hawks prefer to slash the federal government and certainly wouldn't allow more debt.

Instead, the Republicans, who will have full control of the White House, House and Senate next year, with big plans for tax cuts and other priorities, are showing they must routinely rely on Democrats for the votes needed to keep up with the routine operations of governing.

"So is this a Republican bill or a Democrat bill?" scoffed Musk on social media ahead of the vote.

The drastically slimmed-down 118-page package would fund the government at current levels through March 14 and add \$100 billion in disaster aid and \$10 billion in agricultural assistance to farmers.

Gone is Trump's demand to lift the debt ceiling, which GOP leaders told lawmakers would be debated as part of their tax and border packages in the new year. Republicans made a so-called handshake agreement to raise the debt limit at that time while also cutting \$2.5 trillion in spending over 10 years.

It's essentially the same deal that flopped the night before in a spectacular setback—opposed by most Democrats and some of the most conservative Republicans—minus

Trump's debt ceiling demand.

But it's far smaller than the original bipartisan accord Johnson struck with Democratic and Republican leaders—a 1,500-page bill that Trump and Musk rejected, forcing him to start over. It was stuffed with a long list of other bills—including much-derided pay raises for lawmakers—but also other measures with broad bipartisan support that now have a tougher path to becoming law.

House Democrats were cool to the latest effort after Johnson reneged on



US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer celebrates as the Senate begins voting on the government funding bill just in time to meet the midnight deadline, at the Capitol on Friday.

the hard-fought bipartisan compromise. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said it looked like Musk, the wealthiest man in the world, was calling the shots for Trump and Republicans.

"Who is in charge?" she asked during the debate. Still, the House Democrats put up more votes than Republicans for the bill's passage. Almost three dozen conservative House Republicans voted against it.

"The House Democrats have successfully stopped extreme MAGA Republicans from shutting down the government, crashing the economy and hurting working-class Americans all across the nation," House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. In the Senate, almost all the opposition came from the Republicans—except independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, who said Musk's interference was "not democracy, that's oligarchy."

Trump, who has not yet been sworn into office, is showing the power but also the limits of his sway with Congress, as he intervenes and orchestrates affairs from Mar-a-Lago alongside Musk, who is heading up the new Department of Government Efficiency. The incoming Trump administration vows to slash the federal budget and fire thousands of employees and is counting on Republicans for a big tax package. And Trump's not fearful of shutdowns

the way lawmakers are, having sparked the longest government shutdown in history in his first term at the White House.

"If there is going to be a shutdown of government, let it begin now," Trump posted early in the morning on social media.

More important for the president-elect was his demand for pushing the thorny debt ceiling debate off the table before he returns to the White House. The federal debt limit expires January 1, and Trump doesn't want the first months of his new administration saddled with tough negotiations in Congress to lift the nation's borrowing capacity. Now Johnson will be on the hook to deliver.

"Congress must get rid of, or extend out to, perhaps, 2029, the ridiculous Debt Ceiling," Trump posted—increasing his demand for a new five-year debt limit increase. "Without this, we should never make a deal."

Government workers had already been told to prepare for a federal shutdown that would send millions of employees—and members of the military—into holiday without paychecks. Biden has been in talks with Jeffries and Schumer, but White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said: "Republicans blew up this deal. They did, and they need to fix this."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell reminded colleagues "how harmful it is to shut the government down, and how foolish it is to bet your own side won't take the blame for it."

Aston Villa beat Man City to deepen Guardiola's pain

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND, DEC 21

Aston Villa beat crisis-hit Manchester City 2-1 on Saturday to heap more misery on floundering manager Pep Guardiola, who has now suffered nine defeats in his past 12 matches.

Jhon Duran finished off a fine team move to give the home side an early lead and Morgan Rogers doubled Villa's advantage in the 65th minute.

Phil Foden scored his first Premier League goal of the season in stoppage time but it proved to be too little too late.



Pep Guardiola

Pep Guardiola, in the worst run of his glittering career, said Friday that "sooner or later" things will turn around but City's fear factor has vanished.

Guardiola made six changes to the team side that lost last week's Manchester derby, bringing in goalkeeper Stefan Ortega and reshaping his defence with Rico Lewis, John Stones and Manuel Akanji.

Mateo Kovacic and Jack Grealish also returned. But the defending champions started the match in chaotic fashion and could have been behind inside 20 seconds.

Untidy work from Josko Gvardiol allowed John McGinn to steal the ball and he fed Duran, whose shot from outside the box was pushed behind by Ortega.

Villa were millimetres away from taking the lead from the resulting corner, with Ortega, in for first-choice goalkeeper Ederson, producing a superb save to deny Pau Torres.

City then settled and their possession numbers topped 75 percent but they created little.

Instead it was Villa who took the lead through Duran after a superb team move, scoring his seventh Premier League goal of the season.

Youri Tielemans delivered a wonderful defence-splitting pass to Rogers, who burst through City's backline with ease before finding Duran on his right and the Colombian international finished crisply.

Phil Foden tested Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez in the 35th minute after an incisive move involving Lewis.

And Gvardiol squandered a glorious chance moments before half-time, heading over a Grealish cross. Guardiola brought on Kyle Walker for Stones at the break.

Minutes into the second half Villa's Matty Cash lashed an attempt into the side netting after a speedy attack before Duran had a strike ruled out for offside.

Rogers hit the foot of the post just before the hour mark after an intricate team move down the left.

Emery's men doubled their lead 20 minutes into the second half, with Rogers finishing unerringly from a McGinn pass. City created little as they searched for a way back into the game until Foden pounced for a late consolation goal.

Janakpur clinch Nepal Premier League title

>> Continued from page 1

"Credit goes to the team members," Aasif said after the victory. "We saw the wicket and I thought it was going to be a high-scoring match... And anything below 180 would be a good score to chase. We were confident enough that we could chase down the target..."

NEPAL PREMIER LEAGUE
FINAL TU CRICKET GROUND, KIRTIPUR TOSS: Sudurpaschim Royals, bat first. Sudurpaschim 184-9 (20/20 overs) Saif Zaib 69 (43), Binod Bhandari 41 (31); Kishore Mahato 3-0-25-3 Janakpur Bolts 185-5 (19.2/20 overs) Lahiru Milantha 87 (49), Aasif Sheikh 33 (19), Harsh Thaker 30* (24); Ishan Pandey 2-0-19-1 Janakpur Bolts win by five wickets. Player of the match: Lahiru Milantha

Great to see the top order stepping up today and finishing off in style."

The victory also helped Janakpur exact a sweet revenge for their earlier defeats to Sudurpaschim in the group stage and Qualifier 1.

Champions Janakpur won a purse of Rs11 million, while runners-up Sudurpaschim pocketed Rs5.1 million.

Karnali Yaks and Chitwan Rhinos, finishing third and fourth respectively, won Rs2.5 million and Rs1.5 million, respectively.

Sudurpaschim skipper Airee was named the Electric Player of the Tournament, earning him an Omoda car worth Rs6.2 million. Airee scored 227 runs, took eight wickets, held three catches and affected seven run-outs in the tournament. "This tourna-



POST PHOTOS: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Players of Janakpur Bolts celebrate after defeating Sudurpaschim Royals in the final of the Nepal Premier League T20 cricket tournament at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday. (Below) Janakpur's Lahiru Milantha reacts.

ment was good overall," Airee said. "I would like to thank all our supporters for making the NPL a success."

On the defeat, Airee said: "Everyone played well. Our team played well. Janakpur's Milantha and Aasif were good. Our bowling did not go as expected... We could not win but will do it next time."

Zaib, who scored 275 runs and 12 wickets, was named the player of the tournament.

"We were looking for anything past

150 but we got quite a good start," Zaib said. "We were hoping we had given enough. But Lahiru played an unbelievable innings... Credit to the Bolts."

Janakpur's Lalit Rajbanshi won the best bowler award for taking 17 wickets. He won an Ultraviolette bike.

James Neesham was declared the energetic player of the tournament and Karnali Yaks' Bipin Sharma was adjudged an emerging player.

Lumbini Lions won the fair play award.

Position/Award	Team/Player	Prize
Winners	Janakpur Bolts	Rs1.10 million
Runners-up	Sudurpaschim Royals	Rs 5.1million
Third place	Karnali Yaks	Rs 2.5million
Fourth place	Chitwan Rhinos	Rs 1.5million
Player of the Match (Final)	Lahiru Milantha (Janakpur)	Rs50,000
Siddhartha Bank Player of the Tournament	Saif Zaib (Sudurpaschim)	Rs500,000
Electric Player of the Tournament	Dipendra Singh Airee (Sudurpaschim)	Omoda Car
Red Bull Energetic Player of the Tournament	James Neesham (Janakpur)	Rs200,000
Ballistic Bowler of the Tournament	Lalit Rajbanshi	Ultraviolette Bike
Emerging Player of the Tournament	Bipin Sharma (Karnali)	Rs 50,000 and scholarship worth Rs1million
Nepal Premier League Fair Play Award	Lumbini Lions	-
Ncell Max 4s of the Tournament	Lahiru Milantha (Janakpur)	Rs200,000



HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
Plans may go awry this morning; stay patient. Focus on love and connection to smoothen things. Don't rush long-term decisions; follow what excites you.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
Reconnect with your core values and personal goals, especially if social influences have recently confused you. Use the afternoon to get ahead on chores and tasks. Recharge at home tonight for clarity and balance.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)
Winter inspires hibernation with loved ones, balancing bonding and personal growth. Stay home to recharge and enjoy comfort and luxury. Revisiting old memories could bring delightful surprises.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)
Winter is the most romantic season for singles and couples alike. Establishing healthy boundaries and ground rules within your closest companionships. Express your feelings and enjoy support from loved ones.

LEO (July 23-August 22)
You may require some extra time waking up this morning. Rather than pushing your mind, focus on your surroundings. By afternoon, unleash your social butterfly. Prep for Monday while catching up on errands.

VIRGO (August 23-September 22)
Dreamy vibes will inspire you to linger under the covers, granting permission to prioritise softness over tasks. Luxurious vibes continue to flow, so stay mindful of spending while out with friends today.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22)
Your morning dreams may reveal hidden truths, so reflect deeply. Essential conversations this afternoon improved friendships. Take time to relax and enjoy screen time tonight.

SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)
Throw out what you don't need and hold joy close to your heart this morning. The atmosphere shifts this afternoon, putting you in the mood for silence and the comforts of home. Restructure your routines.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)
Don't let worries about Monday ruin your Sunday. Explore your community or enjoy local events for positivity. Tap into love and joy to end the day uplifted.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)
Start the day with softness, embracing joy and spirituality. Plan for the week ahead to feel stable and in control. Take time this evening to recharge and revisit goals.

AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)
Lethargy vibes flow this morning and fade by afternoon, bringing a burst of energy. Focus on mindfulness and self-love practices for clarity. Share your thoughts with someone if you need support.

PISCES (February 19-March 20)
Morning invites solitude or time with authentic connections. Let go of baggage and focus on self-improvement today. Disconnect from devices and organise for the week ahead.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Hit hard

5 Parts of plants

10 Calendar abbr.

13 Stew pot

14 Kind of magical card

15 Perjurer

16 "Believe — not!"

17 Weight unit

18 "— of Green Gables"

19 Inside info

21 Grasshopper

23 Emcee

24 — and pop store

25 Actress

27 Immerse

32 Placard

34 Quid — quo

35 Standard

36 Old English length

37 Place of contest

39 Shadowy

40 Experts

42 Wallet item

43 At the right moment

46 Limit

48 Trick

49 — de Janeiro

50 Hit on the head

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PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

LOBS

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REST

TEST

28 Coffee-filled vessel

29 Roundup

30 Interrogate

31 Entertainment award

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38 Chronicle (Abbr.)

41 Zebra feature

44 "— — first you don't succeed ..."

45 Crowned head

47 Fix fraudulently

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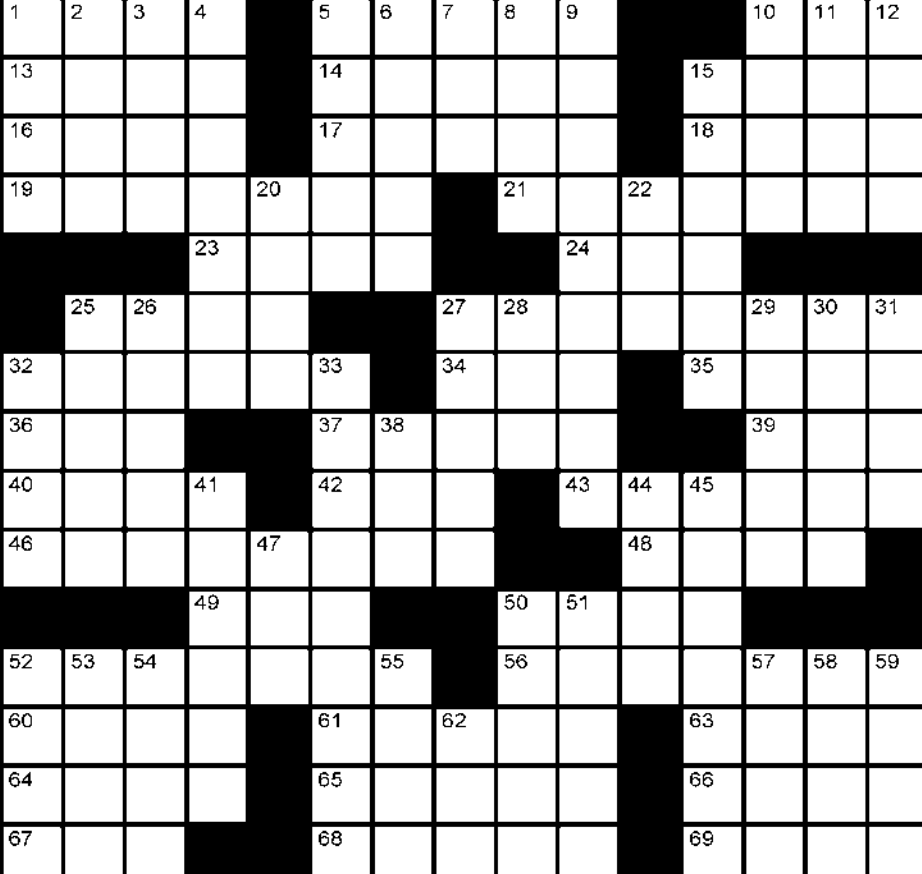
55 Graceful bird

57 Remedy

58 Be cognizant of

59 Stitches

62 ABA mem.



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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

FIVE PICKS

Affordable places for Nepali students in Seoul

Looking to study in one of South Korea's biggest cities? Here are five places to consider for cheap rents and convenient commutes.



Hongdae
Hongdae is a suburb near Hongik University, located 6-7 km from Seoul. Depending on the type of service, bus fares in the area range from ₩1,200 to ₩3,000. Using a Tmoney card, transfers between buses and subways are free within 30 minutes.

Pros:
It is close to several major universities, including Hongik University, providing students with easy and convenient transportation options.

Cons:
As it is a popular destination for locals and tourists, the streets can be too crowded, especially on weekends, which might be inconvenient for some students.

Sinchon
Sinchon is a neighbourhood located approximately 3 kilometres from central Seoul. It is near Yonsei University and Ewha Womans University, making it a hub for students and young adults. The area is well-connected by subway and multiple bus routes, ensuring convenient transportation.

Pros:
The streets are lined with shops, boutiques, and convenience stores, offering everything from fashion to stationery and catering to student needs. Many cafes in this area are designed for studying.

Cons:
Although many locals speak English, some businesses may not have English-speaking staff, which can be challenging for international students.



Dongdaemun
Dongdaemun is popular in Seoul, especially among Nepali and other foreign communities. It is near the Jongno-gu area and has a slightly quieter environment, making it a good choice for students.

Pros:
Some parts of Sinchon retain their old infrastructure and traditional housing, offering a nostalgic charm and affordable living options. Local markets and decades-old restaurants add to the neighbourhood's appeal, making it a budget-friendly choice for dining and shopping.

Cons:
It's far from centric areas, and old infrastructure may lack modern facilities and conveniences.



Gwanak-gu
This place is located on the outskirts of Seoul. It is known for its peaceful environment and affordability. It is also near Seoul National University, which makes it a student-friendly area.

Pros:
This area has a well-connected transportation system, which makes commuting cost-effective and convenient.

Cons:
Since it's on the outskirts, it has fewer social and cultural experiences than central areas.

Itaewon
Itaewon is a trendy, multicultural area with high-end, budget-friendly options. It is also known for its vibrant night-life.

Pros:
It is a trendy and vibrant area with diverse cuisines and cultural influences. Affordable housing options with a variety of choices are available.

Cons:
The mix of high-end and budget options can make finding housing challenging. The area's international focus may overshadow opportunities to experience traditional Korean Culture.



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK

FICTION PARK

Miss Silwal's miseries

She was supposed to attend a business conference at Hotel Indrawati, far from the neighbourhood.

○ SUGAM GAUTAM

If there were a rulebook for observing people's behaviour atop the neighbourhood houses, Miss Silwal would undoubtedly be labelled 'mannerless.' Not that she cared about what people thought of her. But society and its people have always berated someone like Miss Silwal, who doesn't always sail toward a forceful current. Not everyone can sink and swim against the tides. It requires a certain amount of confidence and a lot of guts. Miss Silwal was not ordinary—or at least she liked to think so. One might wonder why a married woman still wanted to be addressed as Miss Silwal. She always enjoyed answering this, laughing at people's obsession with finding logic in everything.

Once, when a neighbour next door asked this question at a vegetable store, she smiled and said, "I just love the way it sounds. Miss. It sounds sweet, no?" The woman looked as if she wasn't satisfied with the answer, but Miss Silwal moved ahead, picking up a pumpkin and a cucumber. Of course, Miss Silwal didn't visit the vegetable store to make small talk with a busybody.

This Saturday, Miss Silwal was supposed to attend a business conference at Hotel Indrawati, far from the neighbourhood where she lived with her twelve-year-old daughter. A streak of light had already seeped into the room, but Miss Silwal remained collapsed on the bed, scrolling through her newsfeed and reacting to posts now and then. A news article about a leader's involvement in a cooperative scam caught her attention. She always liked it when the national media exposed fraudulent leaders and their mischief. As she finished reading the article's first sentence, a text message appeared on her phone. The message from Ajay Sir read: The conference is delayed for an hour. It will start at 10.

Miss Silwal almost jumped out of bed as she read the text. A few seconds later, she got out of bed, walked to the window, and dialled Ajay Sir's number.

"Good morning, sir," Ajay Sir glanced at his wife,



SHUTTERSTOCK

who was scrubbing the dishes, and replied in what sounded like a whisper, "Good morning."

Over the last two years of friendship, Miss Silwal had already understood that such a cheerless reply came only when Ajay Sir's wife was within earshot. Clearing her throat, Miss Silwal added, "Thanks for reminding me. I had completely forgotten that we were attending the conference. Thank God it's starting at 10." She looked at her wristwatch, gifted by her husband on the first anniversary of their marriage. She could prepare a proper breakfast in two hours, but she loathed the idea of cooking something while glancing at the watch now and then.

Ajay Sir had already hung up the phone before she could ask about the exact location of Hotel Indrawati. Miss Silwal lazily dragged her body in her sleeping suit toward the room where her daughter slept alone. She sat on the edge of the bed and ran her long fingers over the contours of her daughter's face. A wide smile materialised, as it always did, when she studied the charming features of her daughter. Miss Silwal knew very well that Pratikshya inherited that long nose from her father, who would reiterate this every time the cou-

A streak of light had seeped into the room, but Miss Silwal remained in bed, scrolling through her newsfeed.

ple talked about their daughter. Only the shiny, black hair almost reaching Pratikshya's waist gave the impression that she was Miss Silwal's daughter. Although Pratikshya was a carbon copy of her father, Miss Silwal couldn't help loving her. Pratikshya had become a calm and studious child, and her mother liked that she didn't inherit any ferocious qualities from her father.

"Wake up, sleepyhead! Mom will be leaving for the conference," Miss Silwal whispered in her daughter's ear. On Saturdays, Pratikshya would sleep till 9, and her mother never protested because Pratikshya put so much effort into her studies throughout the week. Whenever the mother had to go out for meetings or parties or wherever, Pratikshya would be dropped at the residence of Miss Silwal's mother, a widow who lived alone in the next neigh-

bourhood. Although the widowed mother detested her daughter's ways and the masculine touch to Miss Silwal's personality, she always looked forward to seeing her granddaughter and wished the charming little girl could live with her.

"Good morning, Mom," Pratikshya chirped, rubbing her eyes with the back of her hand.

"I'll be leaving for the conference at 9," Miss Silwal ruffled her daughter's hair and hugged her, which Pratikshya always saw as an exaggerated form of love.

"That means I'll get to see my grandmother, yeah?"

"You are right, little champ. Why don't you inform your grandmother that you are coming?" Miss Silwal offered this suggestion while rummaging through the closet for a pair of black stockings and a long skirt—an outfit that Pratikshya thought never matched her mother's physical appearance.

"I will call her. Is the breakfast ready? I'm starving, Mom," Pratikshya grunted and creased her brows.

"Oh, that! I'm sorry, dear. Your grandmother will cook your favourite meat for you. I'll eat something on the way," she blurted and looked in the mirror. The only thing Pratikshya couldn't

bear was hunger. If she was hungry, then she needed to eat right away. She just hated waiting for food. And though Pratikshya looked visibly upset having to wait for the meal, she inwardly relished the prospect of eating mutton gravy cooked by her grandmother—she loved how the flavour lingered on her tongue long after she had eaten her share.

With strands of hair scattered all over her unwashed face, Miss Silwal didn't look appealing, but it wasn't a concern for her. For no reason, Miss Silwal changed her plan of donning a long skirt; she put on a long coat, washed her face, applied almond oil to her scalp, and decided she was ready for the day.

"Are you ready, dear?" she knocked on her daughter's room door.

"I am coming. Wait. Dad is calling on my phone," Pratikshya said in a voice awash with worries. Miss Silwal noticed an edge of anxiety in her daughter's voice, which only happened when she had to tell her mother that her father was on the other end of the telephone line. Her mouth agape, Miss Silwal stood outside the door, torn between asking her daughter to open the door or leaving in silence.

When was the last time she talked to her husband? she wondered. Perhaps it was a week ago when her phone rang in the eerie silence of midnight. She added three more hours to Nepali time, and when she realised it was past three in the morning in Korea, her intuition suggested not answering the call. But assuming that there must be something important her husband needed to tell her, she picked up the phone.

In a slurry voice, the husband hurled as many cuss words as he could, occasionally stopping to ask a question devoid of any curse, "Tell me, who's that bearded man on your side?" She recently uploaded a photo captured on a short trip, where she posed with her favourite writer from Pokhara. It was just a regular interaction, where they had talked about books over a few cups of coffee. The husband repeated the question, mindful not to include any humiliating words. Miss Silwal didn't answer, knowing her answer would make

no difference. Had it been the first time her husband said all those unpleasant things, she would have wept, cried, and even apologised needlessly. But she was thankful that he was, at least not in Nepal.

Before her husband flew to Korea some five years ago, her life was more miserable with all the beatings and insults. And the day her husband boarded the plane to Korea, she felt like a huge weight had been lifted off her chest. Even now, while he was away from home, he would find fault in his wife's actions and call at midnight to curse and humiliate her. Pratikshya wasn't privy to this bitter relationship between her parents, but she could not do much. Her father was good to her, and so was her mother.

At 9 pm, Miss Silwal walked down the stairs and instructed her daughter to open the front gate so she could retrieve her scooter from the small parking area. Despite her multiple attempts, to her chagrin, the scooter wouldn't start due to a defect. She immediately took a phone out of her pocket and dialled Ajay Sir's number.

"Sir, it looks like the scooter's engine has failed. Please come over to my house."

"Alright, I'll be there in fifteen minutes." There was no question of denying Miss Silwal's request.

In exactly fifteen minutes, a long, black car pulled into the narrow alley of their neighbourhood, drawing everyone's attention from the rooftops. Pratikshya knew this uncle, who taught at the same college as her mother. But it was not just Pratikshya who knew this man with the long, black car—the entire neighbourhood knew it was the same car that often dropped Miss Silwal off in a drunken state outside her home. All those times, little Pratikshya would be at her grandmother's home. But now, as Pratikshya and her mother climbed into the car, the little girl wondered what it would feel like if it were her father behind the wheel. Even Miss Silwal dreamt of this as the car raced off.



Gautam is a writer from Pokhara.